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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Statement submitted by Equality Now, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Over 50 years ago, countries adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". That fundamental right has echoed for decades in conferences, treaties and declarations. Almost 10 years ago, in the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing, 189 Governments agreed that laws that explicitly discriminate against women undermine equality, and pledged to revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex. Yet even a sampling of laws demonstrates that inequality, in its most overt form, has not been vanquished.

In 1999, Equality Now published a representative sampling of such laws from 45 countries, in our report *Words and Deeds — Holding Governments Accountable in the Beijing+5 Review Process* (at www.equalitynow.org). The following year, at the special session which was held to review the Platform for Action, the General

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Assembly adopted an Outcome Document that established a target date to eradicate discriminatory laws. That target date, 2005, is fast approaching.

We are pleased to report that a number of countries have superseded or repealed the highlighted laws. Members of the Commission on the Status of Women Peru and Turkey are among those countries that have rescinded the discriminatory laws highlighted in Equality Now's report. In doing so, these countries have set the example of moving from words to action, demonstrating a commitment to the human rights of women and to the fulfilment of obligations undertaken in Beijing through the Platform for Action as well as other international instruments.

Of the laws cited in the 45 countries included in Equality Now's report, 9 have been superseded or repealed. Thirty-six other countries cited in the report continue to have discriminatory laws in force. Some of these countries are members of the Commission on the Status of Women. We urge each member State to examine its own laws and the laws in our report carefully, to pledge to eliminate all discriminatory laws, and to take immediate, concrete steps to that end.

Law is the most formal expression of government policy. Explicitly discriminatory law is a fundamental abrogation of basic human rights. We have highlighted de jure discrimination with regard to violence against women, personal status, economic status, and marital status. Of course, discrimination is far more widespread than explicitly discriminatory law, and our report is itself only a sampling of such laws. A key step, however, in supporting the diverse priorities for social change that women have voiced, is to take action on a concrete pledge, almost a decade old, to eradicate the most blatant expressions of inequality.

In addition to the leadership role taken by individual members, the Commission as a whole has a mandate from the General Assembly to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We hope that the Commission, as an essential component of its focus this year on the human rights of women, will adopt a resolution reminding Governments of their commitment and the target date of 2005 agreed in the Outcome Document, expressing concern over the continuing existence of so many discriminatory laws, and urging all Governments to take immediate action to rescind these laws.